UPDIKE'S USE OF THE QUR'ANIC VERSES IN TERRORIST

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ABSTRACT
This article exposes Updike's use of the Qur'anic verses in his novel *Terrorist.* Apparently, the writer wants to investigate a Muslim terrorist's mind, which causes him to launch deadly attacks against the American people. However, the results of Updike's investigation are problematic and subjective. Updike seems to be a new Orientalist who manipulates the Qur'anic scripture to assert his mastery, neutrality and intolerance of Islam for non-believers. It proves that his presentation of Islam is based on stereotyped myths and lies. The narrator claims that the protagonist "Ahmad", under the guidance of his religious teacher Sheikh Ahmed, inspired by the irrational and suppressed tone of the Qur'an, commits a suicide attack at Lincoln Tunnel but in the end, he is persuaded by his Jewish- school- councilor to discard this idea. Conclusively, it sounds that Updike fails to detach himself from his characters and misuses the Qur'anic verses to defend his pre-supposed ideology against Islam.

Keywords: Terrorist, Colonization, Orientalist, Qur'anic verses.

Introduction

There have always been conflicts between the East and the West for centuries, for example, the Roman and Persian Empires fought numerous battles to subdue each other. Interestingly, after the commencement of Islam, this animosity took a new turn and found a new object in the face of Islam. From the past to the present times, the West has still been successful at various occasions to win this battle on the physical grounds as the British Empire colonized most of the Muslim world in past. In the current scenario, in fact, America has been dictating the Muslim world and its policies. However, the reality is that the spirit of Islam is still alive and growing day by day.

Due to modern technology, the tactics and weapons of war have been changed enormously. Now the media is on the driving seat. By the use of propaganda techniques, facts are molded and the ground realities are twisted for media has the power to influence the results of any war. Same exercise was done in the Iraq war. In the image of Saddam, first the media portrayed a fierce enemy and then prescribed the war against Iraq to save the world from Saddam's deadliest weapons, which never could be found in the history of Iraq.

After the fall of Twin Towers and Pentagon attacks, the western media and especially the American media present Islam as the greatest threat for the civilized world. According to Morey, Peter and Yaqin, Amina Muslims are framed, as a homogenous zombie like body, incapable of independent thought and liable to be whipped in to frenzy at the least disturbance to their unchanging worldview.[1] Both the writers explain these images as "abstract distorted pictures".[2] This phenomenon explains that a gap exists between the representation and reality when the reality is twisted and the distorted representation takes its place. It is obvious that the representation asserts the identity, which facilitates the minds of common people to frame any object in to a specific image. Here the issue, in Akbarzadeh, Shahram and Smith, Bianca's words, is that "Unfortunately, the western media and writers are still poking the old stereotypical Orientalist image of Islam and Muslims.[3]

As it is mentioned in the previous section that both Islam and Muslims are missing the true representation in the West, consequently, the question arises, why is this representation problematic for Muslims?

Firstly, what media and most of the western writers are showing the picture of Islam and Muslims is categorically unjust, for this is a politicized and biased version of the Western minds. Said unfolds this phenomenon and writes that Islam is not homogenous "It is a diverse set of practices that range from culture to culture. However, the ways in which Western cultures have begun to "know" Muslims and Islam are largely related to what is called Orientalism, historically located in the Western construction of non-Western cultures like the Other; as a foreigner, aloof, out of date, irrational, sensual and passive (1978). Exposing the quite similar position, Richardson says, "colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism, which call the "East" to "Western" consciousness, Western organization and Western domination.[4]

Ironically, the material which is being published and shown about Islam and Muslims in the mainstream western media and novels is a distorted version of Islam. By employing the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks, the Western media and writers have put on the blinkers to link Islam with terrorism and Muslims as fanatics. This irresponsible behavior can easily be traced down as sweeping judgments and generalizations for some political purpose and historical prejudice with Islam. It is also important to notice that these representations are sometimes gendered specific, whereas the Western media portrays a man having beard as terrorist or extremist and woman wearing hijab is constructed as repressed who needs to be liberated from patriarchal dominant and violence of the Muslim society. These Western perceptions of Islam and Muslims further suggest that Muslims are intolerant of other religions and Western cultures.

The most serious and gross impact of such clichés and misrepresentations is that these stereotyped portrayals are affecting the minds of common westerners who actually do not want to indulge in these affairs. As a result, the world has been divided into a bipolar world and especially, this cleavage is more widening in the western countries where Muslim communities are living in bitter and threatening conditions.

For example, *Herald Sun* (14/09/2001) entitled "Hate attacks sweep nation" reports: Dozens of anti-Muslim attacks were reported across the United States in an ugly backlash to the terrorist attacks in New York a Washington. Police stopped 300 protesters from marching on mosque in the southwest Chicago suburb of Bridgeview yesterday. There were no injuries but three people were arrested. "I'm proud to be American and I hate Arabs and I always have," said Colin Zaremba, 19, who marched with the group from Oak Lawn. In Chicago, a Molotov cocktail was tossed at an Arab-American community center and afire bomb was hurled at a mosque in Montreal.[5]

Besides the societal level, this discriminatory attitude is also creeping up to government level. Specifically, in some of the western countries, Muslim community is facing hurdles against Islamic practices, although, these restrictions are also against the European civil and human rights. Recently, the government of France has put a ban on hijab, as Wikipedia states that:[6]

> From 11 April 2011, it is illegal to wear a face-covering veil or other mask in public places such as the streets, shops, museums, public transportation, and parks. Same is the situation in other European countries like in Belgian where in 2010, the lower house of parliament approved a bill for banning face-covering, but this was not taken into account because the Belgian government failed to approve this bill from the Senate. Although in 2010, partial prohibitions were also discussed in Netherlands and Spain. In Italy, bans on Muslim practices were announced locally, but later they were announced unconstitutional.

At the same time, in Austria, public debates have begun on this issue, while Germany, United Kingdom and Switzerland have not examined the legislation, although in the United Kingdom Instructions were issued, leaving the question to the discretion of the school administrators and magistrates.[7]

Keeping in view the whole situation, the main objective of this paper is to identify the effects of John Updike's use of Qur'anic verses in his novel *Terrorist* on the reader's mind.Updike is a renowned contemporary figure in American literary circles for writing about current topics like, religion, family, youth, sex and suburban life. After the fall of Russian Federation and the failure of communism, Islam and its adherents have been continuously under attack by the western regime and its allies. John Updike, as one of the many American post 9/11 writers, focuses on representing the Muslims as 'the others' and Quran as a totalitarian and retrogressive book which orders its followers to use unfriendly and irrational attitude against non-Muslims. For Updike Islam is a fanatic religion that he asserts in one of his interviews: "Islam doesn't have as many shades of gray as the Christian or the Judaic faith does. It's fairly absolutist, as you know, and you're either in or not.[8]

The current study is a kind of a library research which is based on textual references. Our primary sources consist of the novel *Terrorist* itself and the book "Oreintalism" by Said, Edward. Throughout the history, the mythology of Orient has

received many contributions from Orientalists, scholars, historians, politicians, poets, novelists, and travel writers. Said points out "that Islam was one of the first areas of investigation that captured the attention of early Orientalists. He argues that Orientalism is a style of thought. Said further explains the Orientalism as: [9] In order to support and reinforce the Western political, economic and cultural power and control over the Muslims, Orientalism produced a kind of 'knowledge' about Islam as the religion of the West's menacing 'others'. This Islam was anything that the West was not. It was portrayed as an absolutist religion, which in its very nature, was incompatible with modernity, democracy, human rights, which was intolerant towards Western values and people.[10]

The author of the novel, *Terrorist*, tells the story of a New Jersey teenager, Ahmad Ashmawy- Mulloy, the son of a long-absent Egyptian father and an Irish-American mother. Ahmad has chosen Islamic righteousness, the Straight Path,[11] in the face of American decay and corruption. In the absences of his Egyptian father Omar Ashmawy, Ahmad was raised by his mother Teresa Mulloy who is an Irish-American painter and nurse. Soon after coming to the State University of New Jersey for business studies, Omer met Teresa which results in their marriage. He was 'decamped' when Ahmad was three. Ahmad is a good student and his grades are also good enough to take admission in a college, but he plans to get a job as a truck driver. Shaikh Rashid, the antagonist of the novel, is an Imam and teacher of Qur'anic lessons in the local mosque, has put the idea of driving truck in Ahmad's mind. Jack Levy, Ahmad's guidance counselor at school tries to steer Ahmad toward the college against his chosen career as a truck driver.

For the Sheikh, driving is a practical skill of good dignity, and university education serves only to promote secular (American) beliefs. Ahmad also fears that university research will strengthen his occasional religious doubts. Trucking is also the way that makes Ahmad participate in a terrorist conspiracy against American (non-Muslim) "infidels", an attempt to blow up the Lincoln tunnel under the Hudson River. In the end, on Levi's further advice, Ahmad realizes that he was wrong and abandons the mission.

While reading the novel, it feels that Updike is unable to distances himself from his characters and let them express freely what they feel and think. However, Talking to New York Times, Updike reveals, "I think I felt I could understand the animosity and hatred which an Islamic believer would have for our system. Nobody is trying to see it from that point of view. I guess I have stuck my neck out here in a number of ways, but that's what writers are for, maybe" Now the question is where does Updike stand? Does he only present the details and let his reader decide or influence the reader's mind unconsciously? According to Said, it is impossible for a writer to write anything without being influenced by the circumstances around him or her because nothing is possible in vacuum. Said elaborates his point more clearly that no one has ever invented a method for bringing a scientist out of the circumstances of life, because of his (conscious or unconscious) involvement in a class, a set of beliefs,

a social position or a mere activity to become a member of the society.[12]

It appears form the plot that Updike employs the same stereotypical Orientalist approach, which has always been prevalent in the West. Unfolding the Orientalist dogma, Said writes that the Western writings about the Orient are a kind of floating mythology of the East, taking place not only from modern views and popular prejudices, but from. ,, vanity of peoples and scientists.[13]

However, Updike strikingly employs the Qura'nic verses without any hesitation to testify his Orientalist approach. By using the verses, Updike wants to give an impression that he has a sufficient mastery and knowledge of t Islam and the Qur'an. Meanwhile he is trying to assert his neutrality and strengthen his claim of representing Islam and the Qur'an in a true perspective. Finally, he argues that Islam is against the tolerance and patience which are the benchmarks of Western and American society.

Knowing the fact that every Muslim holds an unpredictable amount of reverence for the Qur'an, Updike uses audaciously the Qur'anic verses to assert his design and knowledge of the Qur'anic scripture. Sometimes it feels that *Terrorist* is a kind of textbook for the high school students who are reading it for their term exams, not for fun.

In the novel while explaining a particular Qur'anic surah,Al-Fil (The Elephant), Shaikh Rashid,Ahmad's teacher, explains the historical background of the surah with biographical details of the Prophet's upbringings. Haji Mohammad describes this detail pointless as " [it] may be unnecessary for a student who has spent seven years and a half learning about Islam. That would be among the first things [for] a new student of Islam [who] would encounter [them].[14] In fact, Shaikh Rashid's provided biographical information is true, rather Updike intends to give an impression that he has really studied the Quran and investigated about Islam.

Updike makes use of the Qur'anic expressions and sayings of the Prophet quite regularly. For instance, nearly 60 to 70 times in the novel, he has employed them to explain the contextualized situation.

By mixing the novel with the sacred text, Updike not only wants to credit his proficiency but also strengthens his claim of presenting the true picture of Islam and Muslims in *Terroris*. At same time to establish his neutrality, Updike draws a parallel, between the Quranic scripture and American life to create the irrational and aggressive tone of the Qur'an. Actually, whatever Ahmad and Shiekh Rashid say, these are the writer's words and assumptions, which he himself put in both Ahmad and Rashid's mouths. By identifying the Updike's authorial voice, Knopf, Alfred points out that he [Updike] proves himself relatively inept at the essential task of free indirect style…. He will begin a paragraph in his character's voice … decide utterly to write over his character.[15]

Ironically, Updike portrays that both the characters are themselves skeptical about the Qur'an and prophet. Sheikh Rashid accuses some Western scholars for their wrong historical interpretation of the Qur'an. He says that the atheist Western

scholars, in their blind wrath, claim the Holy Book that came together in the most childish rush and fragmented falsifications. Particularly, Sheikh Rashid quotes Christophe Luxemburg, the German specialist of ancient languages of the Middle East,[16] who argues that, "many cryptic Quranic texts will be understood if they are read in Syriac, not in Arabic. In the meanwhile, Shaikh Rashid does not forget to tell Ahmad that Western scholars have also found that the length of Madanisuras sounds awkward.[17] In the novel, Updike makes his reader feel that Rashid's estimations of Western scholars' lack reason, sound judgment, and objectivity. While criticizing the Western scholars, Rashid admits the imperfectness of the Qur'an and the need to resort in metaphor to understand it. As a result, his condemnation of Western scholars has no meanings because Rashid himself admits the same flaws in the Qur'an Meanwhile, Updike further gives an impression that like Sheikh Rashid, Ahmedis also haunted by doubts and uncertainty about the supernatural claims that affirm the existence of a next life predicted by the Prophet and the Quran. Updike narrates Ahmad's doubts in his own words:

If there is a next, an inner devil murmurs. What evidence beyond the Prophet's blazing and divinely words proves that there is a next? Where would it be hidden? Who would forever stock Hell's boilers? What infinite source of energy would maintain opulent Eden, feeding its dark-eyed hour is, swelling its heavy fruits . . . What of the second law of thermodynamics?[18]

The narrator discloses that Ahmad suffers because of the chasm of the problematic and inaccessible ancient [the Quran].[19] Yet he never shows his feelings to his teacher for fear of accusation of blasphemy.[20]

In the narrator's words, the logical outcome of irrational and suppressed attitude of Qur'an is anger, hatred and intolerance, which can lead to horrifying consequences like 9/11 and 7/7 attacks. Unfortunately, Updike only selects that portion of the Qur'an, which deals with unbelievers, and their punishment in case of disobeying the God's will. In an interview with Charles McGrath that was published in International Herald Tribune. 31 May 2006,
Updike said:

A lot of the Koran does not speak very eloquently to a Westerner. Much of it is either legalistic or opaquely poetic. There is a lot of Hellfire-descriptions of making unbelievers drink molten metal occur more than once. It is not a fuzzy, lovable book, although in the very next verse there can be something quite generous.[21]

Updike starts his novel with Devils. Ahmad thinks that these devils try to take away his God" and ends with "These devils, Ahmad thinks, have taken away my God.[22] Updike mostly concentrates on the Quranic ideas of "hellfire"[23] , "Kafer"[24] and "unbelievers"[25] who according to Seheikh Rahshid, all [unbelievers][26]are our enemies. In addition, the prophet said that eventually all unbelievers must be destroyed.[27] What Updike is trying to enforce his reader is not new because his Western predecessors have already written a lot of stuff like this. The only difference is that previously it was done through the plot, characterization and the use of

language but Updike uses a more sophisticated approach by employing Qur'anic text and the Prophet's sayings to prove the stereotyped Orientalist discourse.

Conclusion

In the end, it can be concluded that *Terrorist* is a sort of work which is motivated by the desire to investigate a terrorist's mindset which caused the 9/11 and 7/7 attacks but the results are problematic. Significantly, Updike has used Qur'anic scripture to defend his hypothesis. Updike supposedly depicts the bad influence of Qua'nic lesson on young mind. Both Ahmad and Shaikh Rashid are depicted as being doubtful about the Islam which results in Ahmad's suffering from trying to hold on to his religion. Updike conveys that Islam discourages people from enjoying this worldly life, so Ahmad under Sheikh Rashid's hostile and contemptuous behavior is ready to launch a suicide attack against the Americans and wanted to die in hope for salvation. The main concern of this paper is to identify the approach, which Updike uses to present the Holy Quran and Hadith. Updike makes Shaikh Rashid affirm that the Quran is imperfect and confusing so, one needs to utilize metaphors to understand it. By comparing the Quranic texts with American "Kafer"[28] culture Updike confirms the reader that the Quran calls for hatred and killing of non-Muslims. Owing to the influence of Orientalist approach, it ends up revealing that the author has failed to present the true picture of Islam and detach himself from the stereotypical discourse of Orientalism.

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